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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the low college attainment rates in Maine at all levels of the educational continuum. The percent of Maine adults age 25 and older with associate degrees declined from 6.9% in 1990 to 5.4% in 2000. The percent with bachelors degrees increased slightly from 21.5% in 1995 to 24.1% in 2000, but remains far below the New England average of 30.8%, and below the national average of 26%. Despite having the highest high school graduation rate in the nation (94%), only 55% of Maine's high school graduates enroll in college the following year. There is a growing consensus that one of the major factors in Maine's low college participation is the lack of a comprehensive community college system. Today there are over 1,100 public and private community colleges in at least 45 states across the U.S. Together, they enroll 44% of the nation's undergraduates, serving as a major gateway to higher education. Only 7% of Maine's high school graduates enroll in Maine's public two-year technical colleges. New England states were slower than the rest of the country in transitioning their technical colleges into community colleges, but Maine is now the only New England state without comprehensive community colleges. (AUTH/NB)

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Increasing Access to College: A Community College System for Maine

Maine Technical College System

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Increasing Access to College:
A Community College System for Maine

I. Introduction

As our state continues to transition to a knowledge-based, global economy, Maine's workforce has clearly not kept pace. Sixty-eight percent of Maine employers are currently having difficulty finding skilled workers.(1) And demand for college-educated workers is expected to increase. Between 1998 and 2008, occupations requiring an associate degree or higher are projected to grow by 15.6 percent in Maine, nearly twice the rate of growth of lower-skill jobs. Jobs requiring an associate degree are expected to grow by 27 percent. (2)

The economic and personal benefits of higher education for individuals are irrefutable. Studies show that those with higher education earn significantly higher incomes, experience lower levels of unemployment, and are more likely to encourage their own children to go to college.

Yet, while it is clear that higher levels of education translate into greater opportunities, higher and more sustainable salaries and a stronger economic climate within the state, far too few Maine people are pursuing a college degree. And the low college attainment rates in Maine are at all levels of the educational continuum. According to the recently released 2002 Report by the Maine Economic Growth Council, all five measures related to lifelong learning and higher education—including associate, bachelors and graduate degree attainment and adult participation in education and training—have failed to make any real improvement in the past decade. (3) In some areas, in fact, Maine fell further behind.

- The percent of Maine adults aged 25 and older with associate degrees declined from 6.9% in 1990 to 5.4% in 2000.
- The percent with bachelors degrees grew slightly from 21.5% in 1995 to 24.1% in 2000, but remains far below the New England average of 30.8% and below the national average of 26%.
- The percent with graduate degrees declined from 6.7% in 1990 to 5.3% in 2000, well below the New England rate of 8.7%.

Despite Maine's achieving the highest high school graduation rate in the nation, at 94%, only 55% of our graduates enroll in college the following year.(4) This means that each spring, over 6,000 Maine high school seniors step out into an economy with limited opportunities.

While there have been a number of important initiatives and advances in higher education over the past decade -- including funding for research and development, additional financial aid resources, and significant higher education bond issues, the urgency of the need requires nothing short of bold solutions if our people and businesses are to prosper in the knowledge-based economy.

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This plan seeks to address one critical piece of the higher education continuum: the two-year community college, as both a bridge to the work place, and a bridge to four-year colleges and universities.

II. What are Community Colleges?

Community colleges are two-year colleges whose primary mission is to provide broad access to higher education and a skilled workforce for employers. Community colleges share a philosophy and commitment to serving all segments of society by offering low tuition, open admission, extra academic support for under-prepared students, flexible schedules convenient for adults, and a range of personal support services.

Providing low cost access is fundamental to the community college mission. Typically, community colleges are half the price of a university, providing access to low and moderate income students. The focus of community colleges is on *teaching and learning*, vs. the broader mission of baccalaureate-granting institutions that extend to research, public service and extensive extracurricular offerings in sports and the arts.

Today, there are over 1,100 public and private community colleges in at least 45 states across the U.S. Together, they enroll 44 percent of the nation's undergraduates, serving as a major gateway to higher education. (5)

44 percent of U.S. undergraduates are enrolled in community colleges.
(American Association of Community Colleges)

More than half of community college students are first-generation college students. The majority of students are state residents; in fact, most live within 35 miles (the national average) of their local community college. Community college graduates stay in their state, and usually in their communities. Community colleges serve a large adult population, including laid-off workers and others seeking a change of career. The average age of community college students is 28.(6)

Community colleges offer one and two-year career and liberal arts programs, with the highest credential being the two-year associate degree. Associate degrees represent 80% of community college credentials awarded nationally. (7) While most began with a focus on either occupational programs or transfer preparation, today, all but a few offer both career and transfer programs. In addition, community colleges offer workforce training for business and industry—playing an important role in economic development—as well as credit and noncredit courses for lifelong learning and personal growth.

The primary focus of two-year colleges is to serve and be an integral part of their local communities, with programs and services reflecting local needs, thus the term "community college".

III. Why does Maine need Community Colleges?

Engaging those traditionally served by community colleges is key to increasing college participation in Maine

There is a growing consensus that one of the major factors in Maine's low college participation is the lack of a comprehensive community college system—which in most states serve as a major gateway to higher education, particularly for low and moderate income students. Ironically, while Maine ranks 37th in the nation in per capita income,(8) the state is one of only a few in the nation without a community college system. Yet according to the Mitchell Research Institute, students of lower socio-economic status are much more likely to attend a two-year institution before going to four-year college. As Maine strives to attract more citizens into higher education, the lack of a comprehensive two-year college system stands as a significant obstacle.

While most of the nation's states have had community colleges since the 1960s (or soon thereafter), New England states were slower in developing these unique institutions. In the past decade, however, Connecticut and New Hampshire transitioned their technical colleges into community colleges, leaving Maine the only New England state—and one of only a few across the nation—without comprehensive community colleges.

Two recent Maine studies, one by Dr. David Silvernail and the other by Dr. Samuel Kipp, contend that Maine's low college participation rate may be due in part to the low percentage of students enrolling its public two-year colleges (9). In fact, only 15% of Maine's undergraduates enroll in its public two-year colleges, compared with 42% nationally.(10)

And the lack of a community college system is likely a factor in Maine's low high school to college rate of 55%. In Maine, only 7% of recent high school graduates enroll in Maine's public two-year colleges—the technical colleges—well below the national rate of 17%. Massachusetts, with a long-established community college system, has the highest high-school to college rate in the nation, at 71%. Sixteen percent of that state's recent high school graduates enroll in community colleges. (11)

If Maine is to engage those who are not now going to college (both high school seniors and older adults) it is essential we understand their needs and barriers—which often differ from the traditional, four-year college student—and to offer the right environment for them to succeed.

High School to College: As stated earlier, only 55% of high school graduates in Maine are currently entering college the following year. Research shows that those students who are less likely to go on to college: feel less prepared academically for college; are less likely to have established firm career plans; are more intimidated by the cost of college; and are less confident in their ability to succeed at the college level.(12) In other states, these students often enroll in their local community college, attracted by the low-cost, the shorter duration of two-year programs (compared to the four-year commitment required for a bachelors degree), the academic and personal support services, and the high job

placement of community college graduates.

Maine's opportunity: According to the National Alliance of Business, it is projected that by 2010, 75% of high school graduates in the U.S. will be going on to college.(13) To achieve this level in Maine, an additional 2,300* more high school graduates each year would need to go on to college by the end of the decade. To be among the best in the nation (80%) would mean approximately 2,900* additional high school students enrolling in college. (*Based on 2010 high school graduation projections.)(14)

Adult Workforce: A survey conducted in 2001 of Maine adults aged 18 to 55 without a college degree found that the chief barriers to attaining a degree were: (1) cost and ability to pay; and (2) time. Also cited were uncertainty of career goals and lack of child care. When asked what factors would help them go to college, the following were cited: low cost and financial assistance; convenient location; small classes; part-time schedules; courses available during evenings/weekends; academic help; help preparing for college; career planning; and child care.(15) These attributes are hallmarks of community colleges, which have traditionally served a large adult population.

Maine's opportunity: The 2001 survey cited above found that one in five Maine adults—or 90,000 Mainers—have a high interest in pursuing a degree. Of those, 76%, or 68,000 adults, want to attend within the next one or two years. With 77% of Maine's workforce in the year 2010 already working(16), Maine has a tremendous opportunity to increase the educational credentials of its workforce by engaging more adults in higher education.

Community College Partnership of Maine

In 1998, at Governor King's request, the Maine Technical College System and University of Maine System came together to form the Community College Partnership of Maine, with the charge of working jointly to expand access to low-cost community college services and programs in Maine.

Under the Partnership, both systems have worked to broaden access to two-year college programs, strengthen transferability between two and four-year programs, seek ways to make college more affordable for students, and enhance collaboration among the two systems.

Soon after the Partnership was formed, the technical colleges launched the Associate in Arts transfer program—a core program of community colleges. Transfer agreements were established for the program with each of Maine's universities and several other four-year colleges.

In 2000, The Bernard Osher Foundation donated $2 million to support students enrolled in programs developed under the Partnership. Governor King and the Maine Legislature provided matching funds, creating endowed scholarship programs at both the MTCS and UMS. For the Technical Colleges, this scholarship program enables over 300 students annually to enroll in the Associate in Arts program and take two courses tuition free. It

has been a significant incentive for those who want to go to college but have financial constraints or other reservations about college.

The Partnership represents an important stage toward the development of a true community college system for Maine. The addition of the Associate in Arts (an important access point in other states) improved transferability for students who wish to start at a two-year college before transferring into a four-year university, and greater collaboration among Maine's two public higher education systems, all are essential to having a strong community college system.

Today, over 1,400 former technical college students are enrolled at Maine's universities. The seven technical colleges now have transfer arrangements for the majority of their associate degree programs—for the Associate in Arts and occupational programs. As Maine develops a true community college system, the Partnership will need to continue, to promote and facilitate additional transfer agreements, to monitor the success of transfer students, and encourage more dialogue among technical college and university faculty in common disciplines.

IV. Are Maine's Technical Colleges Ready to serve as Community Colleges?

In philosophy, mission, program offerings, and characteristics, Maine's technical colleges are, today, virtually identical to most community colleges.

Two-year mission. Like community colleges, Maine's technical colleges are two-year colleges whose mission is to prepare students for the workforce and/or transfer to the four-year level. The majority of students are enrolled in associate degree programs. The primary focus of community colleges, and Maine's technical colleges, is on teaching and learning.

Career and transfer programs. Community colleges, like Maine's technical colleges, place a heavy emphasis on career preparation, offering a broad mix of programs in health, information technology, environmental sciences, marine fields, business, manufacturing, early childhood education and many other areas. Programs are designed to support the local economy, resulting in high placement rates of graduates. Maine's technical colleges offer over 230 one and two-year career programs. Ninety-five percent of graduates are placed in jobs or continue their education. Of those who enter employment, 96% are employed in Maine.

In 1999, all seven technical colleges added the Associate in Arts program—a core offering of community colleges that provides the foundation courses needed for career programs and most baccalaureate programs. The program has quickly grown to over 1,000 students. With the addition of the Associate in Arts, the technical colleges now offer all credentials offered through community colleges.

Transfer options. Like community colleges, Maine's technical colleges have built articulation pathways to four-year colleges and universities. Today, transfer arrangements exist for 147 of 169 associate degree programs (agreements are in place with all of

Maine's universities as well as other public and private baccalaureate-granting institutions). About 15-20% of technical college graduates currently transfer to four-year colleges, while many others transfer before earning a degree. Recent research by the University of Maine System shows that 1,439 former-technical college students are now enrolled in Maine's universities, representing about five percent of the University System's undergraduate enrollment. With the Associate in Arts program, this number is expected to increase in the future.

Occupational and general education curriculum. The curriculum at community colleges—and Maine's technical colleges—is comprised of both occupational and general education courses. The strengthening of science and humanities coursework at the technical colleges over the past two decades reflects employers' growing need for stronger academic and "soft" skills—including communication, teamwork and problem solving—which have permeated the workplace. Today, about 30 percent of technical college courses are in general education.

Financial, academic and geographic access. It is the accessibility of community colleges—and Maine's technical colleges—that most distinguish them from other higher education institutions. Like community colleges, Maine institutions offer low tuition, broader admissions standards, academic and personal support services, alternative schedules, and geographic access, all of which make college possible for people who otherwise could not attend. In regard to cost, the technical colleges are within the range of community college tuition rates, but (like our New England neighbors) well above the national average. The Maine Technical College System Board of Trustees has frozen tuition for three years; if the System is able to continue this freeze through the next six years, Maine's rate could be around the national average by the end of the decade if not before. Regarding geographic access, Maine's seven technical colleges and 10 off-campus centers are within 25 miles of 92% of the state's population.

Serve students of all backgrounds. Like community college students, technical college students are very diverse, in terms of academic goals, age, socio- and economic background and academic preparation. Also like community colleges, Maine's technical colleges serve a large number of dislocated workers and other adults returning to school for a new career or a second chance. Many are first-generation college students and a majority come from families with low or moderate incomes. The average age of technical college students is 28, the same as community colleges. Note: with the broader comprehensive mission, Maine's technical colleges will see more students entering college without established career plans, and with an interest in transferring to four-year institutions. Career and transfer advising is an area that will have to be strengthened at the technical colleges, to assure these students' success.

Economic development role. Community colleges, like Maine's institutions, have a related mission of supporting economic development through customized training and other partnerships. About 96% of community colleges offer customized training. Maine's seven technical colleges have a long history of providing customized training to business and industry; about 5,500 employees receive customized training annually through the technical colleges.

Maine's technical colleges have long been affiliated with national community college organizations, including the American Association of Community Colleges and the League for Innovation in the Community College. Technical college administrators and faculty regularly participate in professional conferences, sit on committees, and take part in accreditation reviews, among other activities.

Addendum A lists the actions the technical colleges have taken over the last 15 years to support their evolution to comprehensive two-year colleges.

The following chart lists the key services and characteristics of community colleges, and how Maine's technical colleges compare today.

Community Colleges	Maine's Technical Colleges
Two-year institution; highest credential awarded is the associate degree (certificate, diploma, AS, AAS and AA degrees)	YES—all five credentials awarded (AA since 1999)
Offer **occupational programs** tied to local economy and **liberal arts transfer** programs—to prepare students for work and/or transfer to four-year institutions	YES—over 230 programs offered in health care, business, computers, automotive, engineering technology, hospitality, early childhood, liberal studies and other disciplines
Low cost	YES—lowest tuition in Maine at $68 per credit hour (+/- $2,040/year). Next lowest tuition rate is $109 per credit hour (+/- $3,270/year)
Transferable to four-year baccalaureate degree	YES—147 of 169 associate degree programs (career and liberal arts) have transfer arrangements with four-year colleges. (Agreements with all UMS campuses, Husson, St. Joseph's, Unity, Thomas, UNE and MMA.) In mid-90's TCs began transition to CIHE accrediting body, which will expedite out-of-state credit transfer process; 5 TCs have achieved Candidacy status, 2 others are in process.
Open admission Most CCs require high school diploma or GED, and follow "ability to benefit" standard. Most have prerequisites for some programs. Some CCs receive Adult Ed funds and offer all pre-college courses on campus; others partner with Adult Ed (like Maine)	YES—TCs require H.S. diploma or GED, and follow "ability to benefit" standard. Some programs have additional prerequisites. Under-prepared students are provided remediation or tutoring OR counseled to attend local Adult Education center for additional pre-college coursework.
Support services	YES—support services include academic and personal counseling, tutoring, child care. Note: Transfer and academic counseling need to be expanded.
Accessible to adults through part-time and "nontraditional" schedules	YES—50% of courses now available evenings & weekends. TCs now have over 75 courses available online. 42% of students attend part time. Average age is 28.
Geographically accessible (national average: within 35 miles of home)	YES—MTCS now has 7 colleges and 10 off-campus centers; within 25 miles of 92% of Maine's population. 96% of students are Maine residents.
Offer **customized training** and upgrading for business & industry	YES—TCs provide customized training to about 5,500 employees annually
Support local and state **economic development**	YES—through customized training, Maine Quality Centers, and other partnerships
Community-based partnerships	YES—all TCs have collaborative relationships with local schools, 4-year institutions, economic development and other local organizations

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V. The Plan

GOAL: INCREASE COLLEGE ACCESS TO 10,000 - 11,000 STUDENTS ANNUALLY BY END OF DECADE

To Enable Maine's Technical Colleges to deliver community college services at the level needed in Maine, several actions must be taken.

- **Increase Annual Enrollment by 4,000 (by 2010)** Beginning in fiscal year 2004, add and expand programs statewide, with the goal of increasing access from 6,400 students to at least 10,000 students per year by the end of the decade. This would be achieved by adding and expanding both occupational and liberal arts programs on the seven college campuses, at off-campus centers and online. Requires adding faculty, investing in program equipment and other operations.
- **Strengthen Student Advising** To assure student success, additional student advisors need to be hired to provide academic, career and transfer guidance to students. Community college students come from diverse backgrounds with a variety of needs. Providing strong academic guidance, help establishing and refining career goals, and assistance in preparing for transfer to four-year colleges will be critical to students' successful achievement of their goals.
- **Change Names to Community Colleges** The MTCS is evaluating a change of name to more accurately reflect the broader mission of the colleges today. The name "technical college" may suggest more limited program offerings than exist today, which range from business to childhood education, to technology programs and liberal studies. Furthermore, stereo-types associated with the term "technical college" may be creating an artificial perception barrier to an option that may in fact be the best choice for many people. The majority of the nation's comprehensive two-year colleges today are named "community college", reflecting the comprehensive (career and transfer) mission of these institutions and their focus on serving their local communities.
- **Modernize Learning Facilities.** Maine's seven college campuses have facilities valued at about $150 million — some dating back to the 1800s. As programs and students are added, the need to renovate and update facilities will increase, to assure maximum efficiency of space and provide students with safe and modern learning environments.

INVESTMENT

The current (FY 03) State appropriation to the Maine Technical College System is $41,375,329. For the System to deliver quality community college services statewide, and increase access to 10,000-11,000 students by the end of the decade (adding 1,100 students per biennium, from the current level of 6,400), investments would be needed in three primary areas:

1. Faculty and equipment for new and expanded programs in both occupational fields and liberal arts disciplines
2. Student advising to ensure strong transfer, career and academic counseling for a larger and more diverse student population
3. Infrastructure improvements, to assure modern and up-to-date classrooms and other college facilities

An additional option for policy leaders' consideration is a reduction of tuition from $68 per credit hour to the national average of (currently) $52 per credit hour. This would require an additional subsidy to reduce tuition for all students.

TOTAL COST

- **To add 4,000 students annually** by the end of the decade would require an increase of **$18.8 million by FY10** to the MTCS State operating budget, with an initial investment of **$6.3 million in FY04-05.**
- **To reduce tuition** from $68 to $52 per credit hour would require an increase of **$4.5 million by FY10** to the MTCS State operating budget, with an initial investment of **$6.3 million in FY04-05.**

TOTAL COMBINED COST:

$23.3 million in annual operating funds by FY10
starting with initial investment of $9.3 million in FY04-05

- The MTCS would also need a **Capital Improvements Bond Issue** for facility repairs and upgrades in Fall 2003 (amount being assessed)

END NOTES

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12. The Mitchell Institute, "Barriers to College in Maine Study: Exploratory Discussion Groups of Maine High School Students," Summary of Research Findings; conducted by Critical Insights (August 2001)
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ADDENDUM A

Advances the Technical Colleges have made over the past 15 years to evolve from vocational technical institutes to two-year comprehensive colleges:

1. Expanded occupational programs in computer technology, health care, behavioral health, biotechnology, engineering technology, early childhood education, business and other disciplines, to augment traditional trade offerings.
2. Under the Community College Partnership, added Associate in Arts in General/Liberal Studies programs in Fall 1999. With this addition, each technical college now offers a full complement of credentials found in the comprehensive community college including the AA, AS and AAS degrees, diplomas and certificates as well as special certificates through the continuing education/corporate divisions.
3. Strengthened academic/liberal arts curriculum and added arts and science faculty.
4. Strengthened transfer agreements with four-year institutions; close to 90% of associate degree programs have transfer arrangements with four-year colleges.
5. Implemented process to achieve accreditation by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE) of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEAS&C) in the mid 1990s. Five colleges have achieved Candidate for Accreditation status (highest category available by policy for institutions new to CIHE). The other two colleges are in process.
6. Frozen tuition for three consecutive years to bring it more in line with the national average, and expanded scholarship opportunities to reduce financial barriers.
7. Strengthened and enhanced libraries, including joining Maine Info Net (MINERVA) and other statewide collaboratives to enhance access to journals and publications. Libraries were also strengthened and expanded with funding from the 1999 capital bond issue.
8. Achieved accreditation or certification of programs of study by professional accrediting bodies, where appropriate.
9. Strengthened professional development of employees (especially faculty) to keep professional knowledge and skills current and to strengthen academic credentials as appropriate.

10. Established benchmarks based on national standards and trends, especially those found in community colleges.
11. Expanded geographic access by adding off-campus centers; the 7 technical colleges and 10 off-campus centers are now within 25 miles of 92% of Maine's population. Also engaged in partnerships to bring technical college courses to University Centers.
12. Strengthened developmental and remedial programming and support services for under-prepared students and adults who have been out of school for a while.
13. Strengthened partnerships with Adult Education to support adults transitioning into college.
14. Strengthened partnerships with high schools to increase college participation of high school graduates (example: Tech Prep).
15. Made system-wide commitment to increase understanding of diversity and global issues for employees and students. Identified as one of the major goals in MTCS Strategic Plan; established partnership with The Stanley Foundation: Global Education.
16. Increased course offerings available in the evenings, weekends and summers; roughly 50% of courses are now available at "nontraditional" times.
17. Launched online courses, to provide greater access to courses and programs.
18. Strengthened holistic development opportunities for students though extracurricular activities (student government, recreational, social, cultural and residential life) and student life services including honor societies and other student clubs.

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